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RUEHGO/AMEMBASSY RANGOON 2914  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000884

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [ENRG](#) [EWWT](#) [PBTS](#) [PHSA](#) [EPET](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH SEEKS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO DEMARCATE  
BAY OF BENGAL TERRITORIAL WATERS

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11. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 5.

Summary  
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12. (SBU) The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) is seeking foreign aid for a survey of the nation's continental shelf in the Bay of Bengal. According to the GOB, Bangladesh requires a seismic survey of 4,000 kilometers in the Bay of Bengal to bolster its case for maritime borders under the UN Convention on Law of the Sea. This request may be raised by Foreign Minister Dipu Moni during her upcoming visit to Washington. Please see paragraph 6 for the full text of the diplomatic note requesting this assistance.

Bangladesh seeks to bolster its Bay of Bengal claim  
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13. (SBU) Bangladesh, India and Burma have conflicting views on the demarcation of territorial waters in the Bay of Bengal, which has the potential to be a rich source of oil and natural gas. U.S. firm ConocoPhillips was a winning bidder for oil/gas exploration of eight offshore blocks following a 2008 GOB tender, but boundary disputes with Burma have forced the GOB to award only two of the eight blocks to Conoco pending a resolution of the boundary issue. (NOTE: Conoco's award documents were reportedly signed by the Prime Minister on September 9. END NOTE.)

14. (SBU) Mission Dhaka has learned the GOB simultaneously sent this same request to the German, French, Norwegian, Dutch and Canadian missions in Dhaka. We are in touch with the missions to ascertain whether these governments will provide assistance. We have heard unofficially that the German government cannot fund such a survey but would be willing to "coordinate with other donors." The Germans also plan to offer lessons learned from its experience with the 1969 North Sea Continental Shelf case.

Comment and Action Request  
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15. (SBU) While keeping in mind the U.S.-India strategic

partnership, there are U.S. economic interests in assisting Bangladesh, given the potential benefit to U.S. firms like ConocoPhillips. Although a survey of this size and scope may be practically and financially impossible, there may be ways to provide a small measure of support. We understand the U.S. Geological Survey conducted an onshore survey in Bangladesh in approximately the year 2000. Perhaps the USGS has off-the-shelf information that it could share with Bangladesh. We request that the Department consult relevant agencies, like the USGS, and advise Mission Dhaka of the USG's ability to meet this GOB request.

Text of GOB request  
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16. (U) Quote: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh presents its compliments to the Embassy of the United States of America in Dhaka and with reference to the national obligations under the UN Convention on Law of the Sea - 1982 (UNCLOS) has the honor to inform that the Ministry is currently preparing its submission for the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) using both public domain data available on Bay of Bengal and primary data collected by own means. It may be noted that, Bangladesh ratified the UNCLOS in 2001 and as per relevant provisions of the Convention, it will make its submission to the CLCS to delineate its Outer Continental Shelf in the Bay of Bengal by July 2011. However, in compliance with the technical guidelines of CLCS, Bangladesh deems it necessary to conduct a dedicated seismic survey in specific parts of the Bay of Bengal before its final submission. Given the expertise and experience of United States of America, the Government of Bangladesh would like to request for US assistance in this regard.

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It may be mentioned that, the technical assistance Bangladesh looks for would include the acquisition of data by surveying a 4,000 km line (approximately) in the Bay of Bengal, processing, interpretation and submission of those by an appropriate US agency in a manner compatible with the requirements of CLCS. Considering the extremely short time available before submission, the Government of Bangladesh would appreciate if the entire task could be completed by June 2010 (acquisition and processing by March 2010 and interpretation and submission by June 2010).

The Ministry has the honour to further inform that, in case the cost involved cannot be covered under the existing framework of bilateral cooperation, the Government of Bangladesh would be willing to undertake the survey on joint-funding basis.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh avails itself of the opportunity to renew to the Embassy of the United States of America the assurances of its highest consideration. End Quote.

MORIARTY